

**STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL TO FULL COUNCIL –
25th SEPTEMBER 2024**

Submitted by: Councillor Simon Tagg

Portfolio: All

Wards affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To provide an update to Members on the activities and decisions of Cabinet, together with the Forward Plan.

Recommendation

That the statement of the Leader of the Council be received and noted.

Reasons

To update Council Members on the activities and decisions of the Leader and Cabinet and to allow questions and comments to be made on the Statement.

1. **Cabinet Meetings**

Cabinet met on 10th September, detailed below is a selection of decisions and other actions of the Leader and Cabinet since the last Leader's Statement.

2. **Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2029/30**

In preparation for the Council's 2025/26 budget, Cabinet received the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Council remains financially stable and is progressing significant regeneration projects across the Borough as well as dealing with the ongoing gas odour issues from Walleys Quarry Landfill. As with all local authorities across the country, the Council continues to be affected by rising costs for materials, wages, fuel and energy, and growing demands on services.

An anticipated additional £1.4 million of savings are required in 2025/26 with specific concerns including the effect of a proposed Government reorganisation of the business rate system, the continuing demand to provide temporary accommodation for families seeking short-term help after becoming homeless and the national pay award.

The focus to 'bridge the gap', as in previous years, revolves around resource efficiency, savings and commercial income generation.

Cabinet has again this year written to the government and local MPs emphasising the necessity of adequate central government support to meet the growing demands on the Council budget.

3. **Bradwell Dingle Play and Recreational Facility Improvements**

Bradwell Dingle will receive £492,500 investment via a S106 funding agreement associated with the new housing development on land behind Knype Way.

Cabinet is keen for the local community, particularly those living around the Dingle, to have a central role in shaping the improvements. This could include upgrading outdated play equipment, new multi games play areas, fitness equipment and a community garden.

Council officers will engage with consultants and work with the Friends of Bradwell Dingle Group, local councillors and will also consult with residents of all ages to develop the proposals.

4. **Staffordshire-Wide Agreement on Climate Planning Policies**

The Council has joined with other councils in Staffordshire to enhance building standards with a raft of environmentally sustainable practices.

The aim is to make homes as energy and water efficient as possible, maximise opportunities to use renewable energy, and reduce reliance on car use in new housing estates. The new policies will be implemented County-wide to ensure a 'green standard' across the board and will help the Borough to achieve its net zero target by 2050.

5. **North Staffordshire Local Air Quality Plan**

Cabinet received an update on the air quality issues affecting the A53 at Basford Bank and the scrapping of the previously proposal of a bus gate.

The Council, over many years, has voiced substantial concerns about the effect of the installation of a bus gate causing congestion in parts of the Borough by diverting traffic and pollution to other less suitable routes and adversely affecting local businesses by reducing passing traffic.

In late 2023, a study was commissioned to review the bus gate's potential impacts on factors such as air quality and traffic flows in the wider area post Covid. The Council has worked with the Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council as the highway authority on an alternative plan that addresses the remaining air quality issue on Basford Bank.

The City Council will now progress an alternative option to a bus gate which sits within the city boundary, and will not affect traffic flows on Basford Bank, for approval by the government – this was the subject of a confidential report to cabinet.

6. **Q1 Finance & Performance Report 2024/25**

Cabinet received a report detailing first Quarter performance. At the end of June 2024, the Council had 82% of measures on track showing a strong start to the new financial year.

On the back of already positive waste and recycling performance we have seen further improvements in kerbside collection rates and recycling and composting percentages.

Focussed work on supporting the well-being of staff and attendance has led to a welcome reduction in staff absence which will continue to be monitored.

Ongoing regeneration work within the town centre, particularly around the market and car parking, has meant that performance figures relating to our priority 4, Town Centres for All, are not available for this first quarter.

Over half of all measures are improving or maintaining on the previous year's result and three projects relating to One Council and commercial activity have now been completed as part of the 2022-2026 Council Plan.

The Council continues to closely monitor performance measures and actions and uses this data and stretch targets to ensure continuous improvement to service delivery for our residents.

7. **Borough Local Plan Regulation 19 Consultation**

The latest eight-week consultation on the new Borough Local Plan ends on 7th October. There is still time for residents to have their say on proposals that will shape future development in the borough up to 2040.

The new Plan will guide planning decisions about new housing, employment sites, infrastructure, protecting public green space and ensuring sustainable growth that meets the needs of the borough over the next 15 years.

There have been nine public engagement events across the borough and comments about the Plan can be made via the web portal, email or in written form. All submissions will be forwarded to the independent government Planning Inspector when the Local Plan is submitted later in the year.

8. **Queen Elizabeth II Statute**

Planning permission has now been granted for the erection of the statue of the late Queen Elizabeth in Queens Gardens.

Created by internationally renowned Staffordshire sculptor Andy Edwards as part of the legacy from the Borough's 850th anniversary celebrations last year, the unique design is based upon photographs of the Queen taken during her visit to Newcastle in 1973 to celebrate the borough's then 800th anniversary.

Cast in bronze, the statue will be one-and-a-quarter times life size and will stand at ground level rather than on a tall plinth to enable visitors to interact with Her Majesty.

The statue will be officially unveiled on 11th October at 10.30am and will be a wonderful addition to our award-winning Queens Gardens which already boasts a statue of Queen Victoria.

9. **Heart of England in Bloom awards success!**

It was announced on Friday 20th September that Queens Gardens has won the Mike Garwood Memorial Trophy at the Heart of England in Bloom awards and that the Newcastle-under-Lyme Business Improvement District (BID), supported by the Council, won Gold and is the BID Category Winner going through to the national awards next year.

This comes hot on the heels of the Borough winning the national overall winner in last year's Britain in Bloom. Well done to everyone involved.

10. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan can be found at: -

[Browse plans - Cabinet, 2024 – Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council \(newcastle-staffs.gov.uk\)](#)

Councillor Simon Tagg
Leader of the Council